

HILLINGDON SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on Tuesday 23 November 2021 at 10am via Zoom

Voting members

NAME	ORGANISATION	ATTENDANCE	TERM ENDS
Maintained Nursery (1)			
Ludmila Morris	McMillan Early Childhood Centre	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Maintained Primary - Schools (4)			
Rachel Anderson	Dr Triplett's School	PRESENT	Sep 2023
Duncan Greig	Breakspear Primary School	PRESENT	Sep 2021
Kris O'Sullivan	Deanesfield Primary School	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Carly Rissen	Colham Manor	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Maintained Primary - Governors (4)			
John Buckingham	Glebe Primary School	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Jim Edgecombe (CHAIR)	Whiteheath Junior School	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Tony Eginton	Minet Nursery & Infant School & Hillside Junior School	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Phil Haigh	Cherry Lane Primary School & Meadow High School	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Maintained Secondary (1)			
Liz Horrigan	Harlington School	PRESENT	Sep 2021
Maintained Special (1)			
John Goddard	Hedgewood School	PRESENT	Sep 2022
Academies (9)			
Aftab Ahmed	Guru Nanak Sikh Academy	ABSENT	Sep 2023
Peter Edgley	Bishopshalt	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Tracey Hemming	Middlesex Learning Partnership	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Nicola Kelly	Charville	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Helen Manwaring	Swakeleys School	PRESENT	Sep 2022
Catherine Mosdell	Frays Academy Trust	APOLOGIES	Sep 2023
David Patterson	Queensmead School	PRESENT	Sep 2023
Colin Tucker	Ryefield	PRESENT	Sep 2024
Sandra Voisey	Laurel Lane Primary School	PRESENT	Sep 2023
Special Academies (1)			
Sudhi Pathak	Eden Academy Trust	PRESENT	Sep 2021
Alternative provision (1)			
Laurie Cornwell	The Skills Hub	ABSENT	Sep 2024
Private Voluntary & Independent Early Years Providers (2)			
Elaine Caffary	4 Street Nursery	PRESENT	Sep 2024
(vacant)			
14-19 Partnership (1)			
(vacant)			

Other attendees (non-voting)

Independent Non-Maintained Special School		
Debbie Gilder	Pield Heath School	NOT REQUIRED
Shadow Representative (Maintained Primary - Schools)		
Rachel Blake	Bishop Winnington-Ingram	NOT REQUIRED
Eleesa Dowding	Harmondsworth	NOT REQUIRED
Shadow Representative (Maintained Primary - Governor)		
Jo Palmer	Hillside Infant School and Hillside Junior School	NOT REQUIRED
Graham Wells	Colham Manor Primary School	PRESENT
Local Authority Officers		
Kate Boulter	Clerk	PRESENT
Vikram Hansrani	Assistant Director, SEND & Inclusion	PRESENT
Dan Kennedy	LA	PRESENT
Paul Whaymand	LA	PRESENT
Graham Young	Lead Finance Business Partner - School	PRESENT
Tony Zaman	LA	PRESENT
Observers		
Cllr Kerri Prince		
Cllr Jan Sweeting		

	ACTION
<p>1. INTRODUCTION & APOLOGIES Apologies were accepted and recorded in the attendance list (above).</p>	
<p>2. DSG SAFETY VALVE RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE</p> <p><u>Introduction and background</u> The Chair stated it had been hoped that a draft of the Safety Valve Agreement would be ready to circulate to members in advance of the meeting, however the situation was changing day to day and it would be premature to share the Plan at this stage. This meeting was an opportunity to set out the history of the deficit and for members of the Forum to ask officers questions.</p> <p>The DSG was in ring fenced blocks. One of these, High Needs, had been running at a deficit for a number of years and the Forum had discussed the deficit at every meeting. Officers had said nothing could be done as the deficit was due to insufficient funding of high needs provision from the government. The number of EHCPs had grown significantly, nationally, since the 2014 Children and Families Act. In the last few years, Hillingdon Council had acknowledged the increasing deficit but assumed the government would resolve the matter by increasing financing for high needs. That had not happened.</p> <p>Last year, new regulations for financing councils stated that from April 2023 the deficit would be included in councils' budgets. At the current rate, Hillingdon's cumulative DSG deficit would be around £40million with an annual deficit of £10million or more.</p> <p>The government had offered safety valve agreements to a number of councils: if the DSG could set an in year balanced budget within an agreed time period, the DfE would pay off the cumulative deficit. Councils which had such arrangements agreed last year were struggling to meet commitments and consequently the DfE was being much more challenging and robust in reaching agreements this year.</p> <p>Officers had been meeting with the DfE to discuss proposals and ensure they were realistic and based on accurate data. Schools Forum had received reports from officers but its members had not been invited to attend any meetings.</p> <p>One of the problems for Hillingdon was numbers of children with EHCPs increasing due to children from outside the borough taking place in the borough. Residents could not be prioritised over non-residents. However it resulted in the need to send Hillingdon children to out of borough places, which cost more. One of the main strands of the Plan was creation of additional places in borough.</p> <p>The DfE required any Safety Valve Agreement to have the support of Schools Forum. The Forum would be asked to give its approval to the plan, and to agree a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.</p> <p><u>Current position</u> TZ stated that the timescale to submit the Plan had been revised from November to December to enable further meetings between the Council and the DfE to scrutinise the details of the proposals. Every line of expenditure was being reviewed.</p> <p>This was not just about getting a deal with the DfE. It was an opportunity to bring together services and rethink engagement with schools. It was an ongoing programme of improvement and was about changing culture and how the LA worked with schools.</p> <p>PW stated the DSG deficit standing at £38million was the biggest financial issue facing the</p>	

Council. Reserves would not cover the deficit and if a Safety Valve Agreement was not reached, there would be a significant impact on services when the deficit hit the Council's budget in April 2023. This would have implications for all residents.

A huge amount of progress had been made and the plan would be finalised in the next few weeks.

The DfE was being asked to pay off the £45million deficit and provide capital in the region of £25million for special school places. Schools were being asked to transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block.

VH advised that two main areas of the Safety Valve Agreement were the early intervention offer and providing additional special school places.

Questions from Forum

Q: Forum members have raised concerns about lack of places for years, but there had been no urgency on the Council's part to provide more. How many places would be provided?

A: Figures were changing daily and would be presented as part of the wider document. Each strand would have a detailed project plan that sat beneath it and would be submitted to the Forum when ready.

Q: Growth in EHCPs was 8% per annum, now 12%?

A: Last year there was a surge in requests for assessments post-Covid, especially the 0-5 age range. The strategy for the future was focus on early intervention.

Q: There was likely to be continuing pressure for EHCP assessment from parents. Had that been built into the plan?

A: Parents needed to have faith in the system. The aim was to ensure children got the right level of support at the right time. The LA had a parent and carer forum and would use this to get messages out.

Q: Had consideration been given to the impact on mainstream teachers of diverting attention to those with needs?

A: There was strong engagement with SENDCOs and school improvement.

Q: A few years ago the Council requested a transfer from the Schools Block to High Needs in excess of 3%. Should we get a political commitment not to make such high demands in the future, eg. if other savings in the Plan are not achieved?

A: Transfers were only agreed for one year. The Council was aware that the Forum had not supported higher transfers in the past.

Comments from Forum

- The proposed transfer of 0.5% was to pay off some of the deficit. No child would benefit. However the bigger picture was potential service cuts which would impact everyone. There would be social consequences and schools would pick up these problems.
- Academies were independent from the LA but being asked to give up some of their funding.
- Schools were being consulted on their views on the 0.5% transfer and 3% threshold. It was essential for officers to explain to schools the reasons behind the proposals. Schools needed information and to be part of the discussion.
- For the Forum to make decisions at the meeting scheduled for 8 December, reports would need to go out by 3 December. If this deadline could not be met, the meeting should be moved, bearing in mind the week after was the last week of term. Members needed time to read the papers.

The meeting closed at 11.15am.